

Leslie Riggs named Voc-Rehab 477 Program supervisor

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Tribal member Leslie Riggs came to the 477 Program supervisor position on Nov. 15 with experience in the department. Previously, he was Employment and Training specialist.

"The idea is to determine the issues holding clients back," he says. "We need to concentrate on getting them well, first."

Facing one of the toughest jobs at the Tribe, Riggs keeps his eye on the path rather than the goal.

"If we can take more time with them, our success rate will improve," he says about Tribal clients.

"You can't solve a problem by throwing money at it. If somebody doesn't know how to manage their affairs, it won't help to throw money at them."

"To me, it's not about (getting someone) a job, it's about a career. It's about finding something you like to do and doing it well."

As an Employment and Training specialist, clients sometimes told Riggs, "I can't live on the amount of general assistance."

Riggs told them, "It is not meant to be lived on. It is meant as temporary assistance."

It is not lost on Riggs that the Tribal area in Grand Ronde is seeing reduced job opportunities at both Spirit Mountain Casino and Tribal government at a time when the need for jobs is on the



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Tribal member Leslie Riggs is the Tribe's new 477 Employment and Training and Vocational Rehabilitation supervisor. He succeeds Tribal Elder Patsy Pullin, who recently retired.

increase.

"We (staff) know and the clients know what they are up against," Riggs says. "I know I won't solve all the problems, but this is good work and it needs to be done."

Riggs, 43, grew up in Salem with his mother, who was not a Tribal member, more or less separate from the Tribe. In his 20s, he took off for London as a drummer in the then new band Cheap and Nasty. The group signed with China Records and recorded "Beautiful Disaster"

and later "Cool Talk Injection."

They played all over the world through the 1990s, at concert halls with thousands in the audience. However, late in the decade Riggs' imagination turned toward Grand Ronde and his unknown heritage. In 1996, while still living in London, he joined the Tribe, but it was not until three years later that he actually came to Grand Ronde.

"I felt like a tourist," he says. "I was already amazed at the accomplishments here, and little by little

got involved in community events. I came out and slowly introduced myself."

In 1999, at the age of 32, he started his pursuit of a higher education at Chemeketa Community College. In 2005, he graduated from the University of Oregon in Eugene with a degree in English literature and Ethnic Studies.

They both sunk in. Today, he reads all kinds of literature, focusing these days on plays, and he has a great interest in movies. He's got music — full sets of nearly everybody's work — and here at the Tribe, he has worked in the Cultural Resources Department, teaching Chinuk wawa in the Immersion class, in Education as a HeadStart teacher and then in the Voc-Rehab program.

Although the music seemed to be gone for awhile, he has reconstituted a band and can be heard playing in Salem and at other venues now and then.

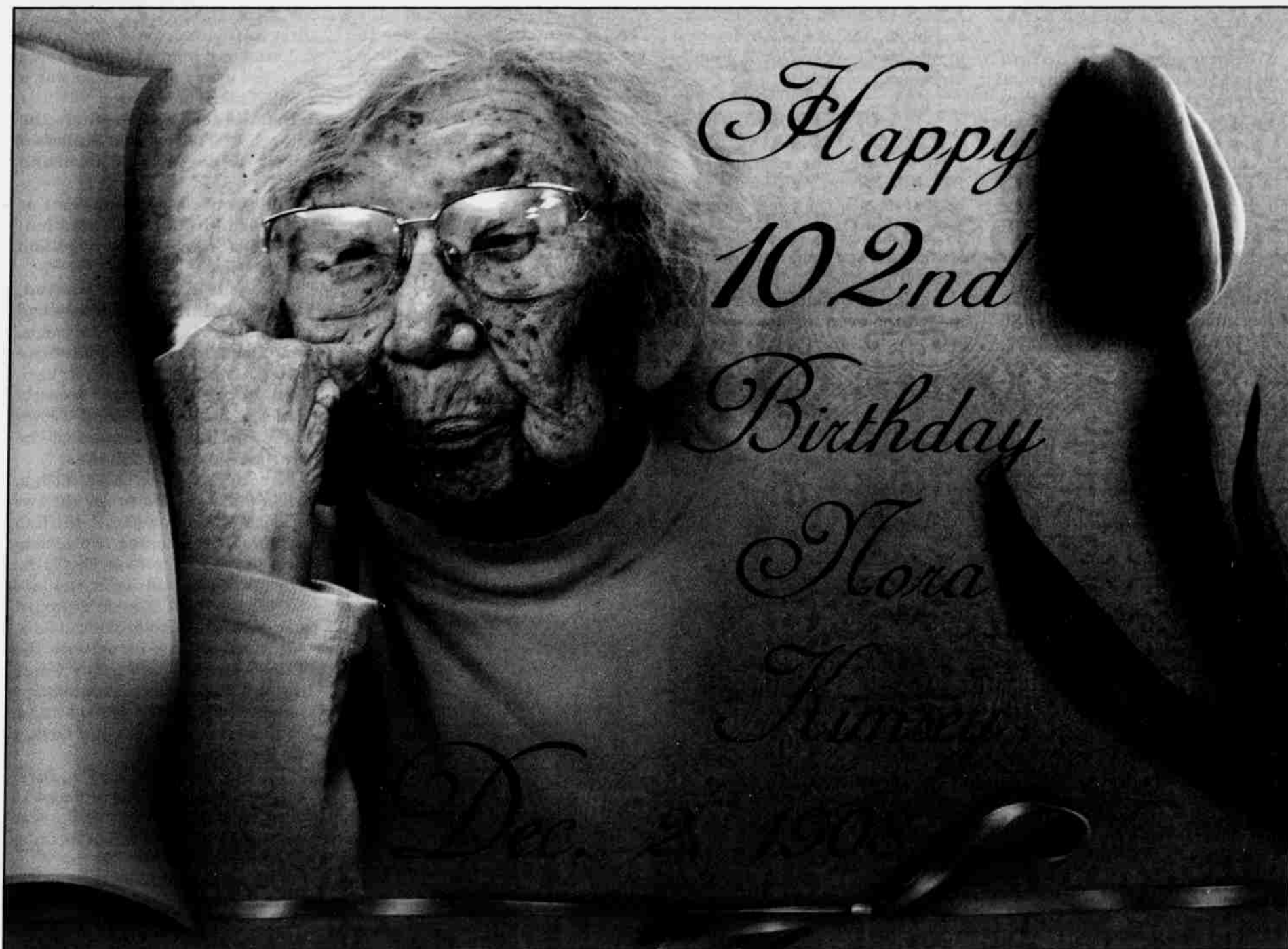
His heart is always at home, though. With three stepchildren, he says, "I do a lot of family stuff. I go to the kids' games and functions."

"My son plays the drums, too, so we have that in common."

He credits the rock 'n' roll lifestyle of his youth, with all its travel, with giving him people skills.

"I've always thought that community service and working together are important," he said.

And that's how he lives his life these days. ■



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